



Howard County

Internal Memorandum

Subject: Testimony & Fiscal Impact Statement
Council Resolution No. 96 - 2008 pursuant to Section 16.301 of the Howard County Code granting variances from the structure and use setback requirements at the new Robinson Nature Center along Cedar Lane in Columbia

To: Lonnie R. Robbins,
Chief Administrative Officer

From: James M. Irvin, Director
Department of Public Works

Date: August 22, 2008

The Department of Public Works has been designated coordinator for preparation of testimony relative to the above referenced Council Resolution that provides for the granting of variances from the structure and use setback requirements at the new Robinson Nature Center to be constructed along Cedar Lane in Columbia. The variances requested are:

Parking Setback:

The parking setback required from the property line is 75' per Section 107.D.4.a of the Zoning Regulations. The parking setback provided on this project is 60'. Cedar Lane has a large right-of-way across this property and in effect the parking is setback 118' from the edge of the street. We have been able to preserve the natural buffer between Cedar Lane and the parking lot and feel that shifting the parking further into the site will cause undue loss in native specimen trees. We request that the parking lot setback requirement for this site be reduced to 60'.

Structure Setback:

Other structures must be setback from the property line 50' per Section 107.D.4.c.(3) of the Zoning Regulations. The future Pavilion has been sited on the existing home site of the Robinson residence. This location was chosen both as a symbolic gesture celebrating the Robinson's legacy and for its proximity to the Simpsonville Mill. While the Mill is not on the Nature Center property, interpreting the history of the mill and the region is a central theme of the Nature Center's educational mission. The Department of Recreation and Parks felt it was important to have an outdoor classroom in close proximity to the mill and mill race features. Furthermore, the pavilion minimally encroaches on the setback (12' at the maximum point) and is well outside of the stream buffer and floodplain for the Middle Patuxent River. The property line closest to the pavilion is already owned by Howard County and is protected as part of the Middle Patuxent Environmental Area. Moving the pavilion to the north side of the existing driveway would negate this symbolism as well as cause significantly more environmental damage to existing forest and to existing steep slopes. The current location is flat and requires minimal grading/disturbance. Across the drive is a very steep bank that would most likely require a retaining wall to site the pavilion in that location. We request that the structure setback requirement for the future Pavilion and its associated parking be reduced to 38'.

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Retaining Wall Setback:

The proposed retaining walls cross into the Cedar Lane road right-of-way by approximately 40'. The retaining wall must comply with the 75' structure and use setback requirement since the walls are over 3 feet (per Section 128.A of the Zoning Regulations) per Section 107.D.4.a of the Zoning Regulations. Ideally, these walls would be located outside of the right-of-way, but due to existing archeology that must remain undisturbed they cannot. Department of Recreation and Parks is willing to maintain these walls. We request that the structure setback requirement for the retaining walls be waived.

The fiscal impact to the County for the construction of the Robinson Nature Center is approximately \$15,500,000.00.

Representatives of this department will be present at the public hearing to answer any questions or concerns. If you require any further information concerning this matter or have any additional questions, please do not hesitate to contact me at your convenience.

cc: Abeye Girma
Jennifer Sager

Tar/legislation/Robinson Nature Center - testimony